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ABSTRACT

Previous research has indicated that women tend to relinquish leadership, or dominance, to men in mixed-sex interactions, even when the woman has a more dominant personality trait or when she is assigned to be the leader. This study was designed to determine effects of perceived intelligence in dominance, particularly if women who thought they were more intelligent than their male partner would more readily assume dominance. College student subjects (N=126) interacted with a partner that they were led to believe was either more or less intelligent than themselves. Sixty-three pairs (same- and mixed-sex) interacted and then completed questionnaires rating their perceptions of their own and their partner's dominance, intelligence, etc. Males were not more dominant than "less intelligent" subjects. However, interactions between sex and intelligence level showed that females with "more intelligent" males were least dominant of all, and males with "less intelligent" females were most dominant. Regardless of intelligence level, females paired with males were less dominant. The results support past studies which indicated that women do not tend to assume dominance with male partners, regardless of the situation. (Author/ABL)

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WOMEN'S DOMINANCE WITH MEN REVISITED:

WHAT IF SHE IS MORE INTELLIGENT?

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Paper presented at the Southeastern Psychological Association
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ABSTRACT

Past research has indicated that women tend to relinquish leadership, or dominance, to men in mixed-sex interactions, even when the woman has a more dominant personality trait or when she is assigned to be the leader. This study was designed to see whether perceived intelligence would have an effect, with particular interest in whether women who thought they were more intelligent than their male partner would more readily assume dominance.

Subjects interacted with a partner they were led to believe was either more or less intelligent than they. Sixty-three pairs (same- and mixed-sex) interacted and then completed questionnaires rating their perceptions of their own and their partner's dominance, intelligence, etc. Males were not more dominant than females, and "more intelligent" subjects were not more dominant than "less intelligent" subjects. However, interactions between sex and intelligence level showed that females with "more intelligent" males were least dominant of all, and males with "less intelligent" females were most dominant. Regardless of intelligence level, females paired with males were less dominant.

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Research has shown that males are more likely to assume dominance in mixed-sex interactions, and that females tend to relinquish dominance to males (e.g., Armitage & Snodgrass, 1989; Carbonell,1984; Megargee, 1969), even when the female is assigned the leader role (e.g., Snodgrass and Rosenthal, 1984). Recently, Wood & Karten (1986) found that visual displays of dominance were equal between men and women when each considered the other competent in the task to be performed. The study reported here was designed to see whether the perceived intelligence of one's partner would affect one's assumption of dominance within an interaction, with particular interest in mixed-sex pairs in which the subjects perceived the woman to be more intelligent than the male. Specifically, we thought that females who thought they were more intelligent than their male partners would more readily assume dominance in mixed-sex dyads, that is, moreso than females

paired with more intelligent males. We predicted, as found in past studies, that, overall, males would be most dominant.

Method

Subjects. One hundred and twenty-six volunteer psychology undergraduate students were given course credit for participation. The subjects participated in pairs, thus there were 63 pairs of subjects, 16 male pairs, 15 female pairs, 18 mixed-sex pairs in which the members of the pair thought the female was more intelligent, and 14 mixed-sex pairs in which they thought the male was more intelligent.

Procedure. Subjects were given a bogus intelligence test before they were scheduled to come to the laboratory. In this pretest, they completed a set of questionnaires, including the dominance and cognitive structure subtests of the Jackson Personality Research Form, the Wonderlic I.Q. test, and a demographic questionnaire. They were then scheduled to come to the laboratory. These pretests were not actually scored for use in the study, but the subjects were led to believe that they were scored.

Subjects were randomly assigned partners and were scheduled to come to the lab for a short interaction. They were informed about the tasks they were going to do and were given a short description of their partners, including (bogus) scores from the I.Q. test and cognitive structure test they had taken previously.

They were also shown their own (bogus) scores. The scores had been manipulated so that one appeared to be more intelligent than the other, although both were made to appear above average for their school. This manipulation provided for the woman to be more intelligent in approximately half the pairs.

The subjects then were instructed to work together on four puzzles of varying difficulty. They could decide between them which puzzle they would work first and work on it in any way they chose. The interaction was videotaped (from behind a one-way mirror, but with their knowledge). After the four minutes alloted for the puzzles, subjects completed questionnaires on which they rated various items concerning the interaction; e.g., their enjoyment of the interaction, their own and their partner's intelligence level, their skill at working the puzzle, how much they liked their partner, etc. They were then debriefed.

Results

The analyses consisted of 3-way ANOVAs with two between factors and one within factor with dyads as the unit of analysis. The between group factors were sex of "high" intelligent person (Hsex) and sex of "low" intelligent person (Lsex). The within group factor was the "intelligence level" of the two members of the dyad (HIs and LOs).

Manipulation checks were provided by subject ratings of their own intelligence and that of their partner. LOs rated themselves significantly less intelligent than the HIs rated themselves

(means were 6.25 and 6.55, respectively, $F(1,59)=4.83$, $p=.03$). Similarly, LOs rated their partners as significantly more intelligent than the HIs rated their partners (means were 6.60 and 6.20, respectively, $F(1,59)=4.98$, $p=.03$).

Analyses of self-ratings of dominance and ratings of partner's dominance did not produce significant main effects for sex, therefore, males were not rated as more dominant overall. Also, there were no significant main effects for intelligence level, so "more intelligent" subjects were not more dominant than "less intelligent" subjects. On self-ratings of dominance, there was a significant interaction between intelligence level and Lsex ($F(1,59)=4.08$, $p=.05$) indicating that LO males and partners of LO females rated themselves as relatively more dominant than LO females and partners of LO males. There was a similar Lsex by intelligence level interaction for ratings of partner's dominance ($F(1,59)=14.79$, $p=.0003$), indicating that LO females and partners of LO males rated their partners as relatively more dominant than LO males and partners of LO females, this is, as would be expected, the opposite pattern as that for self-ratings. The means for these two interactions are shown in Table 1.

Further analyses, comparing mixed-sex pairs only, produced significant Lsex by intelligence level interactions, indicating that females, regardless of their perceived intelligence level, rated themselves as less dominant and were rated by their partners as less dominant than their male partners were rated

(self-ratings: $F(1,30)=7.31$, $p=.01$; partner ratings: $F(1,30)=11.55$, $p=.002$). The means are in Table 2. All comparisons indicate that it is the LO female/Hi male pairs who rated themselves and their partners most differentially - and that females paired with males, regardless of their perceived level of intelligence, were rated as less dominant than their partners.

Discussion

The data did not support our hypothesis that a woman who was perceived as more intelligent than her male partner would more readily assume dominance in a mixed-sex interaction. Instead, the data support past studies that indicate that women do not tend to assume dominance with male partners, regardless of the situation (in this study, differential levels of intelligence). This is one of a series of studies in which women have been placed into interactions with partners in varying situations, and, in these studies, regardless of task or perceptions, women appear to give leadership and dominance to male partners (e.g., Armitage & Snodgrass, 1989; Carbonell, 1984; Megargee, 1969; Snodgrass & Rosenthal, 1984).

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Table 1

MEANS FOR LSEX BY INTELLIGENCE LEVEL INTERACTIONS

Self-ratings of dominance:

	Sex of LO intelligence partner	
	Male	Female
ratings by LO	5.44	5.03
ratings by HI	5.15	5.93

Partner-ratings of dominance:

	Sex of LO intelligence partner	
	Male	Female
ratings by LO	4.21	5.69
ratings by HI	4.82	3.96

Table 2

MEANS FOR LSEX BY INTELLIGENCE LEVEL INTERACTIONS
FOR MIXED-SEX PAIRS ONLY

Self-ratings of dominance:

	HI Fem/LO Male	HI Male/LO Female
ratings by LO	5.67	4.64
ratings by HI	5.22	6.43

Partner-ratings of dominance:

	HI Fem/LO Male	HI Male/LO Female
ratings by LO	3.94	5.71
ratings by HI	5.00	3.71